



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE RISE OF THE IRON MOLDERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION

A STUDY IN AMERICAN TRADE UNIONISM

The undergraduate student of economics who knows anything at all of the history of modern labor organizations generally receives his knowledge either from reading the epoch-making work by Sydney and Beatrice Webb on *The History of Trade Unionism*, or from the lectures which are themselves based upon this book. In either case, the student is led to conclude that modern trade unions were first developed in England and were later transplanted in full bloom to American soil. If the instructor has been sympathetic in his treatment of the principles of trade unionism, he has made his students feel that this institution is one of the blessed heritages which the Old World has bestowed upon the New; if, on the other hand, he has taken an antagonistic attitude toward labor organizations, he has left the impression that the once mother country has used this gift as a means of handicapping the industrial development of her alienated yet feared child.

Whether we look upon the development of American trade unions as a movement to be fostered or one to be suppressed, we cannot dismiss its past by thus placing upon England either the praise or the blame for the presence of this force which helps to determine the relations between American employers and their employees. Of course it is true that the labor organizations of this country have not always kept pace with those of England. The reasons for this we need not discuss here. It is true also that at times the English unions have been a decade or more in advance of the American. But the conclusion which is so often drawn from these facts—namely, that American laborers have looked to the English unions for leadership—is hardly justified. Instead, American unions, as I shall attempt to show in the following pages, have followed their own line of development. In order to trace this evolution, I have chosen for study a trade which may be taken as fairly typical and which shows the stages of development perhaps as clearly as any.

It must be recognized at the outset that not all groups of workmen have had the same grievances to complain of, and hence not all American trade unions have been organized to redress the same wrongs. Yet in practically all of them we are able to trace at least three well-defined stages.

I

Previous to 1847 there were strikes among the iron molders of the United States, and during at least two periods, 1836-1837 and 1843-1844, we have some evidence of temporary organizations of the journeymen.¹ No adequate records of these movements have been left us and we know very little of their methods or of their history. We know, however, that these early organizations were more or less sporadic in their nature and existed merely for strike purposes, passing out of existence with the termination of the strike which called them into being. But beginning in 1847 it is possible to trace the history of organization in this trade as an almost complete narrative. Due to the Irish famine of 1847 and the failure of the European revolutions of 1848, there began to be a great increase in the amount of European emigration to the United States, which continued to grow for several years.² At the same time, the stagnation of business in Europe reacted upon American industry. Prices, which had been rising since 1843, took a sudden drop in 1848. Cuts in wages, closing of foundries, and unemployment followed. Hence we find in 1848 the presence of two disturbing elements in American industrial life, both of which boded ill for the laborers: (1) a sudden decrease in the demand for labor; and (2) an almost equally sudden increase in the supply of those seeking employment. To prevent the degradation which threatened them, the journeymen iron molders tried various schemes which promised relief.

First, coöperation was tried. In the fall of 1847 the employers of Cincinnati cut the wages of the molders.³ A strike followed. When this failed, the strikers formed the Journeymen Moulders' Union Foundry. Stock was issued to the members at \$25 per share and \$2,100 was collected. With this small capital the association purchased a small plot of ground eight miles below Cincinnati, secured a stock of patterns, flasks, tools, and an engine, and had remaining about \$500 with which to make the first payment on their buildings. Their iron, coal, and other raw materials were bought entirely on credit at first. Two philanthropists of the city, Messrs. J. and S. H. Goodwin, advanced the necessary funds with which to

¹ The historical part of this study is adapted from a series of three articles by the present writer which appeared in the *International Molders' Journal*, Nov., Dec., 1911, Jan., 1912.

² Eighth Census of the United States; *Population*, p. xix et seq.

³ Greeley, *Hints Toward Reform*, pp. 196 ff. Greeley visited this foundry in 1849.

erect their buildings and in August, 1848, the journeymen began work as their own employers. The officers of the association consisted of five directors, one foreman, and one business agent (the last to open a store in Cincinnati, buy stock, sell finished ware, etc.), all elected annually by the members. The journeymen withdrew from the proceeds of their labor merely enough to supply their daily needs and allowed the remainder of their wages and profits to accumulate as capital. In this manner their investment more than doubled in a year's time.⁴

On November 23, 1849, the iron-masters of the United States held a convention in Pittsburgh for the purpose of taking measures to get an adjustment of the tariff to their own interests.⁵ Concluding that this task would be, perhaps, too great at that time, and needing a month in which to make repairs in their shops, the employers in Pittsburgh and vicinity attempted to bring pressure to bear on the voters by cutting wages on the ground that lack of protective duties forced them to do so.⁶ Again the result was a strike. Instead of remaining idle, several groups of the strikers started coöperative establishments. One group went to Wheeling and opened a foundry for self-employment.⁷ Another group collected a capital of about \$25,000 and were given a bonus of a like amount by the people of Steubenville, Ohio, to induce them to locate at that place.⁸ A third and larger group, consisting of about one hundred of the strikers, established a foundry at Sharon, Pennsylvania. The amounts contributed by each of its members varied from \$50 to \$6,000, which together with the proceeds of stock sold to outsiders, made a total capital of about \$100,000.⁹

However, not all of those who went out on strike in December, 1849, had sufficient savings to permit them to enter into partnership with their fellow workmen. After the strike had continued for two months, the employers began to import immigrants to fill the places of their former employees.¹⁰ At about the same time the funds of the strikers were exhausted and those who had not become their own employers through association foundries were forced to return to their work. Other attempts at coöperation

⁴ *Pittsburg Post*, Jan. 15, 1850; report of address by Albert Brisbane; Brisbane had visited the Cincinnati foundry a short while before this date.

⁵ *Pittsburg Post*, Nov. 23, 1849.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Dec. 19, 1849.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Dec. 10, 1849.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1850.

⁹ *New York Daily Tribune*, June 4, 1850.

¹⁰ *Pittsburg Chronicle*, Feb. 19, 1850.

were tried during the next two years, a few of which succeeded for a time, until finally the membership dwindled to mere partnerships or individual establishments.¹¹

A second experiment which the journeymen tried was the formation of friendly and benevolent societies. For example, the Friendly Society of Iron Moulders of America was formed in New York city on June 25, 1849.¹² Any iron molder in good health who had served a regular apprenticeship and who was between the ages of twenty and forty-five was eligible to membership. The initiation fee was three dollars and the monthly dues were fifty cents. This organization, like others of its type in other cities, was conducted largely as a mutual insurance association, having provision for sick and death benefits, but paying little attention to protective or restrictive trade regulations.

In the spring of 1850 there was a general movement among the workingmen throughout all the cities of Eastern United States for higher wages. Organizations like the one mentioned in the preceding paragraph took the lead in drawing the members of a single trade in each locality more closely together and in urging them to make united efforts to have their demands granted. These efforts resulted in the formation of associations whose main object was to secure an increase in wages and better trade conditions. By the middle of the year 1850 there was scarcely a trade in any of the Eastern cities that did not have some such organization. These associations retained their beneficial features but added restrictive measures and provisions for the conduct of strikes. Out-of-work benefits were also added, providing for the maintenance of journeymen who were forced to quit work because of their adherence to the rules of the association. Strikes at this time were conducted solely against employers as individuals instead of against all employers in a single locality. The journeymen's association made out its bill of prices and the committee appointed for that purpose waited upon each employer separately to get his acceptance of the new scale. If the employer accepted the scale, his men were allowed to remain at work; if not, they went out on strike and were supported by those who remained at work at trade rates in other foundries.

The high prices of 1850 began to decline a little in 1851 and

¹¹ It should be noted that even in such cases as the Pittsburg strike, comparatively few of the strikers were in a position actually to take up foundry work as their own employers.

¹² *New York Daily Tribune*, June 27, 1850.

the demands of the journeymen became less insistent; many lost interest in their trade associations and allowed their membership to lapse. In 1852 prices began to increase again and continued to increase until the winter of 1854-1855. This necessitated an increase of wages and the molders again organized for this purpose. For example, the molders of Philadelphia formed the Journeymen Iron Moulders' Association, Section No. 1, of the State of Pennsylvania, the main purpose of which was to effect an increase in wages.¹³ The beneficial features of the organizations of two years before were quite generally abandoned and the journeymen concentrated all their energies on increasing wages and creating better working conditions. Strikes now extended to the entire trade in a single locality. In this manner the fair employers were forced to aid the journeymen in bringing the unfair employers to terms. Instead of dealing with individual employers, the journeymen's associations began to deal with representatives of employers' associations, although the latter were at first but loosely organized. Here we find the beginnings of the trade agreement among the molders.

Of course there was as yet no sort of national organization among the journeymen, although in 1853-1854 the unions in different localities began to get in touch with one another through correspondence. These two years were prosperous ones for the employers, and the laborers had little difficulty in getting their wages increased. In fact, many of the trade restrictions employed today were not then needed. The ease with which the journeymen had their demands granted tended to weaken their desire for organization, and led many of them to believe united effort unnecessary. Thus we find them in the spring of 1855, the time when they most needed a strong organization, unorganized and and without funds with which to conduct strikes. The prosperity which the employers had enjoyed during the years 1853-1854 resulted in overproduction. In the winter of 1854-1855 they had plenty of wares on hand but no orders. A depression followed, which affected the journeymen most, and a season of unemployment with all its attendant sufferings continued until well into the year 1855.¹⁴ The employers then took advantage of the

¹³ *Philadelphia Ledger*, Jan. 17, 1853. The name of this organization would seem to indicate that there was some sort of state association existing at this time. There is no evidence that such was the case, although one may have been contemplated by the local organizations of the state.

¹⁴ To the historian, the crisis of 1857 so far overshadowed the depression of

unorganized state of the trade and began wholesale cuts in wages. In many instances the molders could not resist this reduction. In Philadelphia, however, under the leadership of Joseph A. Barford, "the father of No. 1," a different situation prevailed.¹⁵ Barford started a campaign for a permanent organization of the journeymen—a campaign which resulted in the formation of the Journeymen Stove and Hollow-ware Moulders' Union of Philadelphia, on June 16, 1855. The object of the union is set forth in the following quotation from the preamble to the constitution adopted at that time:

. . . In the present organization of society, labourers single handed are powerless, and may be oppressed with impunity by their wealthy neighbors; but combined there is no power of wrong they may not openly defy.

Believing in the truth of the above propositions, the JOURNEYMEN STOVE AND HOLLOW-WARE MOULDERS of Philadelphia, have determined to unite themselves together for the purpose of securing that just and fair remuneration for their labour, which individual effort, however prudent and firm, has hitherto failed to obtain.

To promote our interest—advance our moral and intellectual condition—and give weight and importance to our acts, as well as form a nucleus around which we can rally for the promotion of an object, we have formed ourselves into an association, having in view the general interest of Moulders in all the different positions in which they may be called to act. . . .¹⁶

The whole constitution left the individual journeymen much freer than does a similar constitution today. There was no inconsiderable number of the journeymen who wished the union to have only a few delegated powers. One clause especially—that relating to the limitation of apprentices—called forth much opposition and was practically annulled for a considerable time because of the numerous evasions. One "joker" in this clause made evasion very easy. The journeymen were permitted to put

the winter of 1854-1855 that the latter is seldom mentioned; yet in considering the history of the labor organizations of the period, the latter had as far-reaching results as the former. I know of no single historical account which treats this forerunner of the crisis of 1857 adequately, though its effect on the laboring classes is very evident to one who runs through the newspapers of the time.

¹⁵ For the facts concerning the early history of this Philadelphia union, I am indebted to several contemporaries of Barford, but more especially to S. L. Barford, nephew of Joseph A. Barford and present secretary of No. 1.

¹⁶ The original constitution, together with other early constitutions which will be quoted from time to time, are in the hands of John P. Frey, editor of the *International Molders' Journal*. I am indebted to him for the use of this and other documentary material in his possession.

their natural or adopted sons at work as helpers or apprentices, without first gaining the permission of the union. By 1857 the journeymen molders had acquired such an affection for homeless lads fifteen years of age or over that the life of the union was endangered because of the large number of potential journeymen in the foundries. The result was that this provision was changed and further apprenticeship regulations were enacted.

The molders in other cities soon followed the example of the Philadelphia journeymen so that by 1858 unions existed also in St. Louis, Mo.; Albany, Troy, Peekskill, Utica, and Port Chester, N. Y.; Providence, R. I.; Jersey City, N. J.; Wilmington, Del.; Baltimore, Md.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Ky.; and Stamford, Ct.¹⁷ The depression following the panic of 1857 almost caused the total wreck of the unions existing at that time. Production was greatly decreased and unemployment became the rule. Although the unions were able to survive the shock, they suffered greatly, both from decrease in membership and from the fact that the sharp competition for employment made it possible for the employers to exact odious requirements of the journeymen.

The Berkshire system¹⁸ was then in full force and it was not uncommon to find from one to five "bucks" for each journeyman. Wages were being continually reduced and since all work was done at piece-work rates, every reduction was followed by the journeyman's hiring another "buck." This meant that the molders were cutting their own throats, for in this way they were creating half-trained and unfinished journeymen about four times as fast as the necessities of the trade called for. The employers soon began to give the places of journeymen to these "bucks" and were then free to enforce their own rules. Molders were compelled to buy rammers, shovels, sieves, dustbags, bellows, and in fact everything they used except sand-flasks and patterns.¹⁹

¹⁷ *International Molders' Journal*, July, 1909, p. 430.

¹⁸ According to the statements of molders with whom the writer has talked on this subject, the Berkshire system was briefly as follows: Each journeyman was permitted to use one or more helpers in addition to the apprentice, if any, assigned to him. These helpers or "bucks" were supposed to do only the unskilled work and not to learn the trade. However, it was inevitable that they should learn something of iron molding, and in time the employers came to recognize the feasibility of supplanting a skilled, high-priced journeyman by a low-priced partly skilled workman who, if given the opportunity, would soon learn enough of the trade to be given a rammer of his own.

¹⁹ For the facts of the condition of the trade during this period I am indebted to various contemporary members of the unions of 1857, and especially to the printed communications of the officers of the organizations of that

Many were even required to pay a weekly rent for their floor room. In addition, the system of yearly contracts was introduced. At the beginning of the season the journeymen were compelled to sign a contract to remain with the employer for one year. To compel the enforcement of this contract one third of their wages was retained until the end of the year. If the foundry was in operation only nine months, the molders must lie idle for the other three; they dared not go away, for in that case they would lose the wages due them; and even if they did dare they had no money with which to pay transportation elsewhere. Store pay was quite generally given and in some cases cash pay was the rare exception.

II

The conditions described above were fast reducing the molders to a position no better than that of unskilled workers. The unions tried to correct these evils but the pressure of hard times prevented the success of their efforts, and even they themselves were continually threatened with disruption. Then too, the ease with which employers could import strike breakers from neighboring cities, even though such cities had iron molders' unions, became apparent to the journeymen. The leaders saw that they must in some manner secure the effective support of neighboring unions. As stated above, there had been, previous to this, a sort of loose and unsystematic correspondence between members of different unions—not official and having no direct results. Beginning in 1857, however, there appeared a volume of correspondence among the officers of the various unions, looking to a serious attempt to perfect some sort of organization by which one union could get the effective support of neighboring organizations during a strike. Here these men were confronted with the difficulty of determining what sort of national or central organization they should work to establish. Looking back over this period, Wm. H. Sylvis said seven years later:

When the first convention of iron moulders met in Philadelphia, July 5, 1859, for the purpose of consultation and general organization, no definite idea was formed, or could be formed, of the results which such a "union of hearts and union of hands" could bring about. Nor was it possible to divine what the great objects of such an organization should be. A grating wrong existed, which it was necessary to

period. Of the latter, a series of letters which appeared in the *Iron Moulders' International Journal* for May, 1873 to June, 1874, are most important.

remove, and all felt the necessity of action, as a great want was present to the mind of every member of that body. All that could be done at that time, however, was to interchange views, and make the most of such crude ideas as could be gathered from a free expression of opinion, based upon the experience of those who *felt* the evils we sought to redress.²⁰

Before discussing this first convention, it may aid us in understanding the situation to mention another movement which started at the same time and which may have had some influence in causing the journeymen to draw closer together for common protection. In the latter part of 1858 and the beginning of 1859, the molders were everywhere demanding the return of the wages which they had received previous to the hard times of 1857. Refusal of the employers to grant these demands caused many strikes. The chief of these was the Albany strike which will be discussed later. The employers of Albany combined to resist the demands of their journeymen. Recognizing the benefits of a closer relationship among the members of their class, they sent out letters to employers in other cities, asking for a conference to discuss the formation of a "Founders' League."²¹ The chief purpose of this league was to break up strikes by importing workers from Europe. Some of the employers favored such a movement, but the Philadelphia founders opposed it. They believed that they could strangle any of the journeymen's organizations without calling upon their fellow employers for aid. Since the Philadelphia founders were very influential at this time the movement for the "Founders' League" was abandoned. The fact that such a league was even contemplated, however, may have tended to hasten organization among the journeymen.

In spite of many discouragements, the leaders of the journeymen continued their correspondence. The replies to letters sent out in December, 1858, by President Isaac A. Sheppard and Secretary William H. Sylvis of the Philadelphia union, were so favorable that a call was finally issued for a conference to be held at Philadelphia on July 5, 1859.²² At this convention thirty-five

²⁰ *The International Journal* (a monthly publication devoted to the discussion of the labor question, edited by Wm. H. Sylvis), July, 1866, pp. 111, 112.

²¹ J. C. Sylvis, *Life of Wm. H. Sylvis*, p. 29. There seems to have been an employers' association in Philadelphia as early as 1845, called the Stove Manufacturers' Association of North America. *International Moulders' Journal*, July, 1909, p. 498. Its relation to laborers can only be conjectured.

²² In general, replies were favorable: though, as we shall see from later de-

delegates, representing twelve unions, were present. Two other unions sent letters pledging their support to whatever measures might be adopted. As shown above in the quotation from Sylvis, these men did not know what would be the result of the conference; their chief aim was to get together and exchange views. After three days' deliberation they framed a constitution for a "National Union of Iron Moulders." In the preamble of this constitution we read:

. . . IN UNION THERE IS STRENGTH and in the formation of a National organization, embracing every Moulder in the country, a Union founded upon a basis broad as the land in which we live, lies our only hope. Single-handed we can accomplish nothing; but united there is no power of wrong we may not openly defy. . . . We are no theorists; this is no visionary plan, but one eminently practical. Nor can injustice be done to anyone, no undue advantage can be taken of our employers. *Our business is one entirely domestic; our employers have no foreign competition to contend with; they are not brought in contact with the cheap labor of other countries. . . .* If the profits of their business is not sufficient to remunerate them for the trouble of doing business, *let the consumer make up the balance.*

. . . To rescue our trade from the conditions into which it has fallen, and raise ourselves to that condition in society, to which we as mechanics are justly entitled, and to place ourselves on a foundation sufficiently strong to secure us from further encroachment, and to elevate the moral, social and intellectual condition of every Moulder in the country, is the object of the National organization; and to the consummation of so desirable an object, we, the delegates in Convention assembled, do pledge ourselves to unceasing efforts and untold sacrifices.²³

Yet in spite of this bold declaration, the constitution which follows it leaves the national union almost powerless. The delegates seemed to have some sort of hazy idea of a big local union, including in its membership all the journeymen in the United States, rather than the sort of national union we are familiar with today. The by-laws made the officers a sort of advisory committee. For example, in dealing with the subject of support in time of strike, we read in article 5, section 1, of the by-laws: "Should it become necessary for the Moulders at large to assist the Moulders of any locality to vindicate their rights, the Nation-

velopments, just as many journeymen had been opposed to giving positive powers to the local unions, so now many of them were opposed to any sort of central organization. They feared that the weaker unions would not only be unable to aid the stronger unions but that they would become parasites, living upon the gains of the latter.

²³ Constitution of 1859.

al Executive Committee shall advise the various Local Unions of the fact, and *recommend* (italics mine) to Local Unions what assistance to render." The lack of definite provision for strike benefits seems to have been a serious omission. Yet in the actual working of this provision, it was quite effective.

An example will make this clear. Even while the first convention was in session, nearly all of the journeymen in Albany, N. Y., were involved in a strike to prevent a reduction in their wages, to prevent one third of their wages being retained by their employers until the end of the year, and to protest against the store-order system of payment. The convention adopted a resolution stating, "That we will go to work with a firm and unyielding determination to raise funds for our co-workers during this their strike, and that we will never cease our efforts until our Albany brethren obtain their just rights."²⁴ In spite of the extent of the strike, the disorganized condition of the trade, the power of the employers, and the difficulty of holding men in a new organization during a strike, the national union made it possible for the Albany journeymen to hold out until their demands were granted. Of course, we believe now that strikes are to be avoided if possible. Yet this Albany strike was perhaps the best thing that could have happened to the national union. It at once gave all iron molders throughout the country something to work for as one united group, and its success did much to raise the national organization in the estimation of the journeymen. An even more important result was that the difficulties which the executive committee experienced in conducting this strike served to point out some of the weaknesses of the new organization.

The delegates to the first convention did not consider that they had accomplished any definite results. They had simply met, discussed topics of common interest, set the date for a second convention, framed a constitution for a temporary organization, and made provision for a sort of advisory body to test the experiment in the meantime. Although we date the birth of this national union as July 5, 1859, it was not considered by its founders as being definitely accepted until the meeting of the Albany convention six months later. On the second day of this latter convention the following resolution was adopted: "Resolved: That this convention does now resolve itself into a National Union, adopt the constitution as adopted by the Phila-

²⁴ *Iron Moulders' International Journal*, January, 1874, p. 226.

delphia convention, and that a committee of five be appointed by the chair to report such amendments to and revisions of the constitution as they may deem proper."²⁵ The committee reported several amendments only a few of which were adopted. The chief of these was the provision for traveling cards and the changing of the revenue system from a flat rate of ten dollars per union to an annual tax of five cents per member. The locals still looked upon the central union as a mere advisory body and the chief business of this second convention consisted of recommendations to the local unions concerning the abolition of piece work, legal indenture of apprentices, and denunciation of the "buck" system.

At this convention Sylvis presented his views on coöperation, which he pressed with more vigor later. In an address to the convention he predicted:

That the day is not far distant when the molders will control the foundry business of the country, and become directly interested in the profits;

That the National Union will be in possession of a revenue derived from its investments, sufficient to defray all expenses, and have a surplus without taxing its members;²⁶

That it will possess its own publishing house, from which will emanate its own publications, and send forth a comprehensive literature second to none in the land, in which the interests of labor, so long eschewed, will be fairly represented; . . .²⁷

Later, in describing the reception of these ideas Sylvis said: "Those expressing these ideas at the Albany convention were looked upon as dreamy enthusiasts, giving utterance to the vagaries of an unbalanced brain; while others viewed them as dangerous men, and pitied an overwrought zeal so pregnant with disastrous consequence."²⁸

The short time which intervened between these first two conventions, and the lack of confidence which the journeymen in many parts of the United States had in a central organization, did not produce many new locals, although there were six more represented at Albany than at Philadelphia. The year 1860,

²⁵ *Life of Wm. H. Sylvis*, p. 34.

²⁶ Philadelphia Union No. 1, of which Sylvis was a member, had already begun to look forward to the time when local dues would no longer be required. It had invested its surplus in Pennsylvania Railroad stock and was at this time receiving a revenue from its investment. (Data received from various entries in the ledger of Union No. 1, 1855 to 1862.)

²⁷ *International Journal*, July, 1866, p. 112.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

however, witnessed the formation of twenty-six new locals, including three in Canada. This year also witnessed several important strikes. In fact, the experience of the year 1860 proved that the fears of some of the journeymen, expressed in their objections to the formation of a strong national union, were not without foundation. In soliciting the support of the local unions, the promoters of the central organization had promised to carry to a successful issue strikes which could not possibly be won by the efforts of a single union. The success of the national committee in conducting the Albany strike of 1859 furnished abundant evidence to convince even the most skeptical of the fulfillment of this promise. Unfortunately, the lack of confidence which had been exhibited previous to this time now changed to over-confidence in the ability of the new organization to protect the rights of the journeymen. Elated at the success of their Albany brothers, the molders in other parts of the country felt that at last they had an effective weapon against the exactions of unjust employers. Depending upon this new force to be equally successful in righting their own wrongs, several of the locals declared strikes against practices, which, if the power of the national union had not been overrated, would have been tolerated a little longer at least.²⁹

Weakened by calls for support from various strikes, the national union was practically bankrupt at this time. The total receipts for the year 1860 were \$6125.06, of which all but \$134.32 was expended in strike benefits; and even then several strikes did not receive the financial support of the national union because of lack of funds.³⁰ Of the \$134.32, all but \$23.18 was expended for cards and constitutions. The latter sum was used to defray the expenses of publishing reports. The Albany convention had ordered the publication of quarterly statements concerning the state of the trade in each of the unions, but the first one did not appear until June, 1860, when it came out in four small pages and contained reports from only six locals. A second report, about the same size, appeared in September. The need of a monthly journal was not then recognized, although a labor paper called "The Mechanics Own," published in Philadelphia at this time, was generally considered the official organ of the molders.³¹

By the time of the third convention at Cincinnati, January 8,

²⁹ *Iron Moulders' International Journal*, March, 1874, pp. 289-90.

³⁰ *Proceedings of the National Convention of 1861*.

³¹ *Life of Sylvius*, p. 37.

1861, there had been organized forty-four unions, of which thirty-one were represented at this convention by fifty-two delegates.³²

The unions were given numbers at this meeting, having been known previously only by name. Again the constitution was amended, adding a little more power to the central body. The experience of the preceding year led the convention to adopt the following resolution in regard to strikes: "Resolved: That this body recommend to Local Unions to discountenance all strikes in their respective localities, until every other remedy has been tried and failed."³³

Soon after the delegates to the Cincinnati convention returned to their homes, the Civil War began. The history of what followed, with its business depression and its closing of workshops and foundries, is familiar to all. Thousands of molders joined the armies. Especially, their leaders and men of action were the first to take up arms. The business panic caused reductions in wages and unemployment. Those who remained at home were uncertain as to when they too might be needed at the front. Unions that had weathered the storms in their own ranks during the few years before 1861 now went to pieces. Others adjourned for six months, or a year, or to meet at the call of the president. In any event, this generally meant no meetings whatever during the latter part of 1861 and almost the entire year 1862.

The national union held together until about the middle of the year 1861 when apparently it too ceased to exist. Up to July 1, of that year, the total receipts of the national union amounted to \$1,605.14 of which the Pittsburg strikers received \$1,115.³⁴ This proved to be a useless expenditure, however, as the stoppage of work and the suspension of other unions prevented the strikers from carrying their strike to a successful issue. After July 1, no money whatever was turned over to the treasurer. January, 1862, passed without even a call for a convention. The entire union movement among the molders was apparently dead.

III

In 1863, under the impulse of the growing demand by the government for both men and manufactures, business revived. The cost of living rose rapidly while wages remained at a standstill. Every journeyman molder still in the trade again felt the need of

³² *Proceedings* for 1861.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Iron Moulders' International Journal*, May, 1874, pp. 353-54.

united action. A few of the locals had been able during the depression of 1861 to prevent any reduction in their wages; but on account of the disorganized condition of the trade in other cities, even these few were unable to enforce their demands for wages commensurate with the rising cost of living. Again the members of old No. 1 assumed leadership and appointed a committee to communicate with other locals still in existence, urging the need of holding another convention.³⁵ The replies were on the whole favorable and a call was issued for a convention to meet in Pittsburgh on January 6, 1863. Only twenty-one delegates, representing fourteen unions, were present. Although these delegates looked upon this meeting as simply a postponement of the one which should have been held in 1862, it was really the beginning of a new era in the history of iron molders' organizations of the United States.

The unions had now reached the second crisis of their career. Just as the hard times of 1857 and the following year had exhibited the weaknesses of the independent locals and had resulted in the formation of a loose federation of these independent local unions, so now the panic of 1861 brought to light the weakness of this federation. That these weak points would have been detected gradually, even though the Civil War had never occurred, cannot be doubted; but the events which actually did occur served to reveal many of them in a flash.

The close of the Pittsburgh convention, which had been called to consider the continuance of a nominally existing organization and to adopt necessary amendments to its constitution, really marks the birth of a new organization. Most of the local unions which had called the former national union into being had ceased to exist. The problem which now faced the leaders was twofold: (1) the rebuilding of this national union into an engine of defense sufficiently strong to cope with situations like the one which had recently caused its destruction; and (2) the reorganization of the local unions. The time of the convention was taken up in perfecting a constitution which would effect these ends. The name of the organization was changed to "Iron Moulders' International Union," in order to include within its jurisdiction the Canadian unions. (In fact, however, a few of the Canadian unions were represented at the Cincinnati convention of 1861.)³⁶

The new constitution resembled the old in but few particulars.

³⁵ *Iron Moulders' International Journal*, April, 1874, p. 322.

³⁶ *Proceedings* for 1861.

The officers of the central union were now given definite and positive powers. Up to the time of the Pittsburgh convention, the local unions did not consider that they derived their powers from the national union, but rather that the reverse was true. Hence there had been no charters granted previous to 1863. Now, however, this was changed and the central union began to grant charters to the subordinate unions, defining and limiting their powers.³⁷ The president of the international union was given power to "visit subordinate unions, and inspect their proceedings, either personally or by deputy, and require a compliance with the laws, rules and usages of this Union."³⁸ And since the president alone had the power to grant charters, he had an effective means of controlling the policies of the subordinate unions. Under the new constitution, the revenue of the international union consisted of: (1) a charter fee of three dollars; (2) a fee of ten cents for union cards; and (3) annual dues of five cents per member, payable by the subordinate unions on the basis of the number of members constituting their quota of representatives in the central organization. In case such revenue was not sufficient to pay the current expenses of the organization, a pro rata assessment, levied on the average wages received by the members of each subordinate union, was provided for.³⁹ A similar provision was made for the accumulation of relief funds, except that for this purpose the assessments could not exceed two per cent of the wages.

With these and other changes which clearly mark the new constitution as a document intended to give the central union a much greater degree of control over the affairs of the subordinate unions than it could have exercised previously, the international union began the year 1863 with anything but bright prospects. The delegates to the Pittsburgh convention had succeeded in framing a constitution which promised to foster a strong central organization; but a strong central union could never be built upon a foundation of a few weak local unions. Of the forty-four unions recognized in the convention of 1861, only fourteen, less than one-third, were represented at the session of 1863;⁴⁰ and even these were little more than shadows of their former strength. The next problem, then, was to strengthen these local unions.

³⁷ The writer has in his possession a facsimile of one of these first charters, the wording of which shows clearly this change of the basis of authority.

³⁸ Constitution of 1863, article 4, section 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, article 6.

⁴⁰ *Proceedings* for 1863.

This proved no easy task. Most of the leaders who had built up the locals of 1860 had not returned from the Civil War. The only means of reorganizing these locals was through the central union. Yet here there were no funds available to defray the expenses of such an undertaking. The new constitution had provided that all expenses and loss of time incurred by the president in the discharge of his duties should be defrayed by the international union. It meant one thing to incorporate this provision in the constitution, and another to find the means of carrying it into effect. William H. Sylvis was the newly elected president. As a last resort, the convention at Pittsburgh authorized him to visit, for the purpose of organizing subordinate unions, every locality where there had been a union or where there were enough journeymen to form one. The best the delegates could do to encourage their president in this work was to authorize him to collect the money with which to pay his expenses. Even Sylvis himself did not comprehend the immensity of the task assigned him. In his report given the following year he said: "I had no clear conception of the extent of the task before me, or the means by which it was to be accomplished."⁴¹

As soon as the convention adjourned, Sylvis returned to Philadelphia and laid the whole matter before Union No. 1. This local promptly responded with a donation of \$100 with which to start the work of reorganization. On February 3, 1863, the new president began his task. Within the year he strengthened the fourteen unions represented at Pittsburgh; placed upon a solid basis twelve more of the unions which had existed at the beginning of the year 1861 and which still existed in name at the beginning of the year 1863; reorganized sixteen locals which had entirely disappeared in 1861; and started eighteen new unions. Thus the year 1863, which began with only fourteen subordinate unions, ended with sixty.⁴² All of these Sylvis had visited once during the year, some twice, and a few three times.

During the year several important strikes took place, the most important of which was the Philadelphia strike. The total loss of this strike shook the confidence of other subordinate unions in the effectiveness of the international executive. Although the strike lasted throughout the year and although more than twelve thousand dollars was expended in behalf of the strikers, the employers gained at every point. Yet this loss proved a gain to the later effectiveness of the central union. Sylvis had tried to direct

⁴¹ *Proceedings for 1864.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

the affairs of the central union while attending to his already tremendous task of reorganizing local unions. The set of circumstances which occasioned the lack of confidence on the part of the subordinate unions pointed out the need of a permanent executive office with a salaried officer at its head. Consequently, at the Buffalo convention of January 8, 1864, Sylvis was re-elected president at a salary of \$600 per year.⁴³

Beginning in 1864, the iron molders' unions of the United States experienced a series of successes which insured their continuance as a real force in the annals of American labor. To be sure, they had not eliminated all of their weaknesses, but they had at least blazed the trail for the future. They had, for the most part, passed through the experimental stages which seem to be necessary steps toward the present effective organization. Minor changes in machinery of organization have been made from time to time, yet the main principles of the union are essentially what they were at the adoption of the constitution which marks the third stage of development.

As stated at the outset, the purpose of the writer in giving a somewhat detailed account of the history of a few years of the life of a single trade union, is to illustrate by a typical study the evolutionary process which modern American trade unions—at any rate those which date their birth a half century back—have experienced. It is evident to the reader that the lines of demarcation between each two stages in the development of the iron molders' organizations are quite sharply drawn, and that perhaps no other union experienced such abrupt transition periods. Yet in each of the other trades which were organized in the fifties or sixties we may trace clearly these three stages of development: independent local unionism, federation of local unions into a loose national organization having little or no positive power, and centralization of power in a primary national union having subordinate local unions whose power is largely derivative. In a few unions, indeed, we find a fourth stage, intermediate between the first and second—the state union.

H. E. HOAGLAND.

⁴³ *Proceedings* for 1864.